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LEADERSHIP: WHERE AND WHAT IS LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE?

Siegfried Streufert  
The Milton S. Hershey Medical Center  
The Pennsylvania State University

Contracting Officer's Representative  
George H. Lawrence

BASIC RESEARCH  
Milton S. Katz, Director

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## PREFACE

In 1985, we submitted an advance copy of the forthcoming book "Complexity, Managers and Organizations" to ARI as a contractor's report. The book considered complexity theory as it applies to organizational settings, especially where decision making is of primary importance. The concept of leadership was only briefly mentioned. The present report will complete the theoretical discussion by providing an initial discussion of leadership as it is viewed by complexity theory.

This report and a subsequent report on our leadership theory to be entitled "Leadership and Multidimensionality" will be included as chapters in a forthcoming book with the title "The Multidimensional Executive," (Scribner's, publication date late 1986). The chapters were not written for scientists. Rather, they use language that will, we hope, communicate to those who work as managers in military and private sector organizations. In other words, the discussions in this and the subsequent report on leadership theory will be less detailed and will provide fewer references than a reader of our previous report would have encountered.

Leadership, as considered here, represents the interpersonal component of managerial activity. For those readers who wish to include decision making and other executive tasks as part of the leadership concept, only a reading of the original report in combination with these reports will provide a complete impression of our theoretical approach.

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## Leadership: Where and What is Leadership Excellence?

### EXPLORING LEADERSHIP

"Leadership" is an important concept and an important word. Everyone talks about leadership\*. We are all certain that leadership excellence is the salvation of our country, of our economy, of our company. Some of us believe that leadership excellence solves everything. We admire great leaders. We castigate supposedly "inept" leaders when they fail to do what we expect. Apparently, we believe that leaders must be superhuman. In fact, we often expect miracles from them. Are such expectations reasonable? What, exactly, is leadership anyhow? Are our demands reasonable?

Many popular writers and some behavioral and management scientists have given the term "leadership" a rather broad meaning. To them, leadership is just about anything the successful person thinks and does, especially if that individual is a corporate executive, an entrepreneur or a politician. To these

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\*The interested reader may wish to read part or all of the following books: Bennis, K. and Nanus, B. (1985). Leaders: The strategy for taking charge. New York: Harper & Row; Blanchard, K.H. (1985). Leadership and the one minute manager. New York: William Morrow; Bradford, D.L. (1984). Managing for excellence. New York: Wiley; Fiedler, F. (1984). Improving leadership effectiveness. New York: Wiley; Hunt, J.G. & Blair, J.D. (Eds.) (1985). Leadership on the future battle field. Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's; Levinson, H. & Rosenthal, S. (1984). CEO: Corporate leadership in action. New York: Basic Books.

writers, leadership means organizing the organization. It means instructing, guiding and motivating people and it means solving their problems. It means being at the right place, making the right decisions at the right time - and much more. But most of all, it means doing everything well. Used that broadly, the term "leadership" takes on a rather fuzzy meaning.

Is the pilot who pulls a crowded airplane out of a nosedive a leader? What about the football player who runs 80 and then 78 yards for two touch-downs during a single game? What about the corporate executive who gets the other company to drop their competitive product line? Is that leading? Maybe not.

But what about a President who is reelected by an overwhelming majority? What about the person who collects for the cancer society and brings in three times as much as anyone has ever collected in that neighborhood? What about the senior executive who gets his managers to turn their divisions around toward profitability while divisions managed by other executives continue to go down the drain? There is a difference between my first set of questions and my second set of questions. The second set is more akin to excellence of leading. Leadership is not everything. I would say that leadership has to do with leading people. It has little, if anything, directly to do with technical skills, for example, with managing finances. Leading as I see it, means motivating, understanding, communicating, encouraging, scolding but supporting people.

In some cases, and by some writers, the word leadership has

been used synonymously with "managing." Take the new book by Peters and Austin\*, for example. Those authors want to discard the words "managing" and "management" because, they say, those concepts imply "controlling, arranging, demeaning and reducing." It seems, that they want to replace the word "managing" with the word "leading." The latter, they say, implies "unleashing energy, building, freeing and growing." Their conceptualization is based on a statement of Warren Bennis who suggested that "American organizations have been over-managed and underled."

Indeed, Peters' view of management is primarily concerned with people. To the extent to which people are his primary emphasis, or better his only emphasis, his use of the term "leadership" is, in my view, justified. But "management" goes beyond people. I am not sure that the distinction between leading people and dealing with other functions of the organization is always understood by most readers - or, for that matter, by most popular writers.

The popular all encompassing concept of leadership often is not comfortable with the suggestion that leadership can be "bad" as often (or more often) than it is "good." Hitler called himself the "Fuehrer" which, literally translated, means nothing else than "leader." He led Germany and the rest of Europe into disaster. That, too, is leading. An executive or a team of executives may lead a corporation into financial chaos and

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\*Peters, T. & Austin, N. (1985). A passion for excellence: The leadership difference. New York: Random House, Inc.

bankruptcy. To the extent to which their actions were concerned with the people of their organizations, they, indeed, were leaders: bad leaders.

### Leadership Excellence

So, where and what is leadership excellence? Where and how can we attain it? The next few pages will make it clear that leadership is a far from simple phenomenon. Any definition of leadership, at this point in the chapter, would be quite premature. Let us explore the meaning of leadership throughout this chapter and I will provide a summary and something close to a definition as this particular chapter ends. In the meantime, however, it is important for us to become at least a bit more familiar with the leadership concept and with its varied implications. Toward that end, I will discuss why leadership and decision making are not, as some writers have suggested, the same. I will consider whether leadership exists only at the top of the organizational hierarchy or whether it can be found anywhere. I will show how different tasks and different followers necessitate different leadership styles, styles that can be achieved by flexible, adaptive people. Finally, I will consider how understanding others and how communicating with others represent an art of leadership that is aided by a multidimensional integrative approach to tasks and followers, an approach which, for example, may be based on efforts such as empathy.

Exploring when and where leadership excellence can be found is not enough. Many observers have done that to no avail. We



need to know how we can employ differentiative and/or integrative styles to identify and improve leadership styles. We must determine how we can interface the unique abilities and needs of people with tasks and with the needs of the organization.

#### Leading and Decision Making

I want to emphasize once more that leadership and the capacity to make excellent decisions are not at all the same thing. Many times the two skills have been confused with each other. We do it all the time in organizations. We find that someone is doing a technical job well, and we promote that person to the next higher level, a level where this person is now in charge of his or her previous coworkers. That promotion, however, was based on task skills, not on leadership ability. If the new manager fails at the job, this is the place where it will most likely happen.

We just naturally "assume" that a person who has demonstrated knowledge, experience or even creativity in technical skills would have the ability to lead. The argument that people tend to get promoted to their level of incompetence is well known. That incompetence, however, is rarely technical in nature: after all, many a newly promoted person has just excelled at tasks he or she is now supervising. These tasks were done well; otherwise, the promotion would not have come (unless, of course, they wanted to kick the bastard upstairs - something that certainly would have been a bad reason for promotion). The failing of a new manager is often in the realm of leadership.

That failure may arise from an incapacity to lead, or even from the new manager's belief that he or she must now act in a different way, by being more controlling, more distant, less people oriented.

In higher management settings, promotion to more advanced executive positions is often based on a technical skill known as "decision making" (or contributions to decision making by a team). Of course, the capacity to make excellent decisions and the capacity to lead may be found in the same person. When they appear together, both capacities may derive from a differentiative and integrative style that I discussed earlier, a style to which I will return later in this chapter. However, excellence of leadership or excellence of organizational decision making may occur independently as well. There are excellent leaders who are terrible decision makers. The charisma or the demonic control which some political leaders have used to coax their populations into national disasters demonstrate that leadership excellence can be paired with decision making failure.

On the other side, there are those prophets who had all the needed insights that would have been necessary to avoid threatening disasters, but no one would listen. People don't pay attention to those who do not know how to communicate, to persuade, to lead. Naturally, there are some rare people who excel both as decision makers and as leaders. And, finally, there are the very many who perform poorly in both categories.

In some cases, outstanding leaders need not be excellent

decision makers. Some people are primarily needed to provide support, encouragement; i.e., they are needed to help others to make their own decisions. Leaders who can do such a task must have interpersonal skills, an understanding of the other person's concerns and needs, and enough know-how about that other individual's job and environment. These leaders must be able to generate trust. They should not get involved in decision making. They should be excellent leaders, not decision makers.

In contrast, we may consider the consultant who is brought into the organization to aid corporate executives in technical decisions. That individual provides information. Interaction with people in the organization is likely at a minimum. Leadership, except for some communication skills, is not required. Excellent technical and decision making skill may well be.

Both these examples of leadership skills without decision making skills and vice versa do, however, reflect exceptions. We want to employ people in our organization who have the ability to do a wide range of things. Hopefully, they would be capable of both, leadership excellence and decision making excellence.

#### Levels of Leadership

When we think of leaders, we tend to think of people who occupy advanced executive, professional or political positions. That view is another fallacy. Many of us tend to associate everything of quality with advanced positions. However, leadership exists or should exist at just about all levels in the organization. And, of course, it may differ in quality at all of

these levels. If decision making quality or if leadership quality is poor at the lowest levels in the organization, the best leadership at higher levels may fail\*.

Let us reconsider decision making for a moment. It has been argued that extensive planning activity and complex decision making are things in which only senior executives engage. That view is dead wrong. Equally wrong, I think, are views which associate some kind of executive "quality" with the time length over which people think or plan. We have considered that fallacy before: we are limited by our central nervous system to seven plus or minus two conceptualizations that we can handle at any one time. At a lower managerial level, these seven "things" must focus upon things that happen today or, at most, tomorrow. Once we have been promoted to senior corporate vice president for planning, we can take our seven plus or minus two concepts decades into the future (probably so far that they will turn out to be useless). Nonetheless, we are applying the same planning and decision making style. We are limited by the same number of steps at different points in our career. If we don't make it to the top, our length of planning will never expand, even if we do have the capacity for jobs at elevated levels. The quality of

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\*Unfortunately many organizations do not become aware of their most valuable asset: people, no matter at which level they may work, until the organization needs their leadership and contributions in time of crisis (cf. Moss-Kanter, E., 1983, The change masters. New York: Simon & Schuster). For that matter, the word "asset" applied to people was "tabu" (cf. Odiorne, G.S., 1984, Strategic management of human resources. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass). Fortunately, today, we are beginning to rethink that notion.

our efforts, defined in terms of the number of things that we can integrate, however, remains high, no matter what our job may be.

The same holds for leadership. The platoon leader in the military or the foreman on the assembly line who manage specific actions, who assign people to positions and jobs according to task demands and the abilities of supervisees must, if they are to be successful, have excellent leadership ability. That ability deals with people at quite different levels than one would expect from a four star General or from a CEO. However, the how of the leadership process at both levels may be quite similar. Both of them may be excellent leaders and both of them may be poor at their respective jobs.

In other words, just about everyone in the organization is, or at least can be, a leader. All of us deal with people. Some of the people we should lead work inside our own organizations. Others are on the outside: opponents, clients, customers. All of us can influence these people. All of us can have an impact on how they feel about our organization. We can, to a great extent, determine how much people in our organization and people on the outside will contribute to our goals. Certainly, we can influence how motivated our own people will be toward realizing the goals of our organization.

#### Views of Leadership

President Truman has been quoted saying that leadership is the ability to get people to do things they don't want to do - and like it. That, indeed, is a difficult thing to do. It is

probably the ultimate of leadership. Maybe, we were more easily persuaded in Truman's time. The war was on. A national effort was needed. But, sometimes that kind of thing still happens today: think of all the Democrats who voted for President Reagan, even the second time.... To persuade someone to do something that - on first thought - seems aversive, requires a kind of charisma and power of persuasion that very few of us can muster. John F. Kennedy had the same kind of influence on the public, but in contrast to Reagan, could not "lead" Congress toward support of his legislative programs.

We have been studying, analyzing and trying to discover the secrets of leadership during Truman's time and ever since. Indeed, we have learned a lot. Considering all the knowledge we have gained, one might think that identifying what it takes to be an "excellent" leader should be simple. After all, many great leaders have existed and some still exist. When the Macedonian King, Alexander, led his Greeks through unknown worlds all the way to India, he must have used leadership technology that assured loyalty from his troops. Napoleon enticed the French to follow him twice. There are many other famous leaders throughout history who, for better or worse, were equally effective. Some of them were loved; others were feared. Yet others motivated their followers with an idea, a religion, a promise of reward, the satiation of needs. Different cultures have produced different kinds of leaders, different kinds of followers, different reasons why leaders were persuasive and successful.

The styles of successful leaders were typically well matched to the training, the beliefs and the needs of their followers. There have been many successful leaders, but for any one who attained success, there have been many others who have failed.

Required leadership qualities and follower orientations will change with time as cultures change and as economic conditions change. The leader of centuries past may have been charismatic, but he (there were few obvious women leaders at the time) was typically also authoritarian and controlling. Society and culture demanded it. They were "great men" and they led us to develop the "Great Man Theory." They were the ones who, supposedly, were born to be leaders. They had the insight, the creativity, the skill and the knowledge to do things right.

More recently, we have realized that great leaders aren't always great. Sooner or later they make mistakes. They just aren't as reliable as we had imagined. But, we want reliability. We want "correct" solutions to problems. With that view, some of us have turned to computers. Computers do things the same way all the time. They are not confounded by emotions. Computers can make decisions or at least advise us on which decisions to make. They can decide who should be hired and fired, who should work harder. They can generate pages and pages of neat looking charts and tables that contain incredible amounts of information. They would not fire someone only because they like one person and dislike someone else. However, computers do not "understand" people. They cannot motivate. They cannot be adaptive. In

fact, they don't lead. We need leaders who can deal with rapid changes in our modern world. Today's leadership must continue to come from people.

The American economy has changed. Once upon a time, we couldn't produce enough, especially following the Second World War. Now we find it difficult to give some of our products away, especially on the world market. If we want to improve our products to generate demand, if we want to persuade those out there to buy them, then we need leaders who are - and remain - people. We need leaders who encourage their followers to feel and respond as a cooperative group, as a group with a purpose. We need leaders who can get their followers to develop their full potential and to express that potential through effort, through creativity, through caring and through cooperation at the work place. And we need leaders who can persuade the potential customer to buy only one product line: ours.

Maybe, when we had a smokestack industry, sometime around the turn of the century, it was more important to make sure that the cogwheels of the machines did not get out of line with each other. We had to assure that those wheels interfaced with the rest of the machine, that the equipment would work optimally. Our managers needed to have a mechanical slant that would make sure that the industrial machine could function. We needed, or thought we needed, managers that treated people and machines the way mechanics generally would: in an impersonal and functional way. These managers may not have been nice. Today we would not



like them. Certainly, their employees did not love them. But, they were effective.

Today, American smokestack industry is mostly dying. Other countries now produce steel and basic machinery. Every month we hear that so many blue collar workers lost their jobs and about an equivalent number of service industry employees were hired. Even in the surviving smokestack industry it is no longer as important how many tons of low grade steel you can produce. With increasing competition it is becoming more important whether you can supply a specialty product. It is important how good and fast your service is. It is important how effective your people are.

The cogwheels of the service industries and the cogwheels of high tech industries are people. Today, people have to interface just as cogwheels in our heavy industrial machinery had to do nearly a century ago. Only when people interface, when they work their best, when they love their jobs and like their company, when they become motivated and creative, will modern service and technological companies work as well as the smokestack industries once did. The people of high tech and service industries must be persuasive and innovative. They must be able to sell their products to a spoiled and often disinterested customer. They must be motivated and they must be able to motivate. In fact, they must be excellent leaders.

There are excellent examples of this phenomenon. Donald C. Burr, once head of Texas International Airlines started Peoples

Express Airlines in 1980 after the industry was deregulated in 1978\*. That airline is an ideal example of what leadership of people can do. It grew in a few years from zero to nearly a billion dollar industry. The name of the airline reflects their approach. They are not only focusing on profit; rather they are focusing on people: their own employees and, in second place, their customers. The employees are made stock owners. The feeling is one of "we", of "ownership" rather than competition between labor and management. People working for the company do all sorts of jobs which, at other airlines would be considered below their dignity. They do things for each other because they actually do thing for themselves. They are the company. They are welded together in a way that makes the people cogwheels fit precisely into each other, smoothly, without wear and tear. No wonder, that company is a resounding success. It was people leadership that did the job.

#### Leadership and Situational Demands

So leadership has changed over time. But who is or who can be a great leader? Can a leader be trained? Philip L. Smith, President and CEO of General Foods thinks they can\*\*. Can leaders be identified before they have to face the challenge (and potential disaster) of leadership? Peter Dawkins, retired General and Senior Executive Vice President at Shearson Lehman

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\*Burr, D.C. (1985). Leadership: The element making the difference. Executive Report. Stamford, CT: MacLean Hunter Media, 6.

\*\*Smith, P.L. (1985). Leadership. Executive Report, 3, 23.

Brothers consider it possible by picking out those who display high levels of achievement early in their careers\*. If there are so many failures in leadership situations compared to so few successes, are only a few of us capable of attaining leadership excellence?

As I already suggested, the latter question was first answered with the "Great Man" theory. It was thought by some that there must be a leadership "trait" that a few people possess while others don't. But, if that were true, then great leaders should always be great. However, for many of them their time and effectiveness is limited. Napoleon lost at Waterloo. Che Guevarra was a successful leader of the Cuban revolution which brought Castro, not Che Guevarra into power. Dwight Eisenhower has often been credited for finally finishing off the Second World War (even though it has been suggested that the stage was already set), yet as President, he was more known for his golf scores than for legislative or executive innovation.

The ability to lead with excellence and with success, then, is likely restricted. A leader may have his or her time and place. With this knowledge, leadership theorists began to develop contingency theories. These theories, may, for example, suggest that one kind of leader would do best in one situation and another kind of leader may be needed as soon as that situation begins to change drastically. There is probably much truth

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\*Dawkins, P.M. (1985). Teaching leadership. Executive Report, 3, 7-8.

in that view. Let us consider an extreme example: If the factory is burning down and panic must be avoided, you don't want a democratic leadership style. You don't want to vote on who leaves through the main exit and who escapes via the emergency exit. You want someone who is trained, who can tell people what to do and who can make sure that they do it. In contrast, democratic styles of interaction are clearly preferable when enough time is available, when everyone may have something to contribute - even if the final decision were not made by a vote of all who have participated.

Sir Huw Weldon, Chairman, Court of Governors of the London School of Economics in his "Observations on Leadership"\* refers to such statesmen as Lincoln, Churchill and Eisenhower, all of whom, at a time of crisis, stated policy quite simply and precisely. This policy was stated without evident integrations, without consideration of the thoughts and feelings of people. For example, Churchill called for "victory whatever the price, victory whatever the cost." Crisis calls for leaders who can motivate in forceful and simple fashion. It was under those conditions that Lincoln, Eisenhower and Churchill earned the right to be called statesmen. One might wonder whether all of them would be viewed as favorably, had they led their countries only in times of peace and tranquility.

There is, in other words, little question that different

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\*Weldon, H. (1985). Observations as leadership. Executive Report, 3, 9-10.

situations, diverse task demands and different times require different kinds of leadership. Some people make good leaders in one situation, others in another. But, how many diverse situations are there? If there are too many, if every extreme situation would require a different kind of leadership style or worse, some peculiar combination of leadership styles, then any contingency theory of leadership would fail because of the innumerable contingencies that would have to be considered. With many contingencies, successful leadership would be more of an accident than some identifiable style or a capacity. Fortunately, we have learned enough about leadership to believe that things are not that extreme. There are some common factors. Even if there is no "great person" who is the excellent leader at all times and in all situations, we might be able to recognize what kind of person we might want across a genre of situations and for some tasks with common characteristics.

Peters and Austin (pp 259-296) provide us with the fascinating tale of Sam Neaman who came to McCrory's chain of stores and motivated the personnel of one store (Indianapolis) to go out and explore their competition. He asked them to redo their own store to be better than the competition (at little or no cost). The employees loved it, did it, and turned the store around from a loser to a winner. Neaman could have used the changed Indiana store as a model for other McCrory stores. He did, in a way. However, his model did not focus on what the renewed Indianapolis store looked like. Rather, the model was

how to motivate people. An excellent leader sets overall goals, motivates people to achieve those goals, but lets the followers do the job of implementing and often discovering roads toward the goals. Neaman followed the same strategy in Flushing, New York. He motivated the local employees to do it themselves. In their own way. A different kind of store emerged, this one matched to the kind of people who live in Flushing. It turned out to be beautiful - and it became the chain's best store in New York.

The leadership requirements in both cases were similar. The specific goal was the establishment of profitable businesses. The outcome was overtly different, but produced the same results. Sam Neaman probably understood that a good leader need only provide the framework and the goal, not the individual game plan on how to achieve the goal. Specific decisions can be made by followers, allowing them to obtain "ownership" of their efforts and of their successes. Neaman's style allowed profitable differences to emerge. But his leadership style worked similarly in different situations. Let us take a closer look at leadership styles, what they are and how they work - beginning, again, with a little history.

#### Leadership Styles

It has long been known that people differ in their styles of leading others. Research, originating at Ohio State University, first distinguished between up to five task oriented styles

and up to five people oriented styles\*. Part of that work was based on efforts of Fleishman who distinguishes between leaders who are primarily occupied with structuring the tasks of their followers versus those who emphasize interpersonal consideration\*\*. Those differences reflect at least rudiments of styles, of a general orientation toward leadership behavior. Yet, those descriptions are not enough. They still fail to explain why some persons are able to select the appropriate leadership style at the appropriate time and place and why others use the same style all the time (whether or not it is appropriate) or fail to understand which style is presently appropriate.

Actually, we are in a dilemma. There are so many explanations of quality leadership, so many ways of describing leadership excellence. Unfortunately, the various explanations don't seem to agree. For example, Peters and Austin list multiple attributes which, they say, make a good leader. Yet, some of their critics suggest that these attributes may apply in many situations - but are completely out of place in others. I am sure that Peters and Austin are often right. As one executive said to Tom Peters: his views are a "flash of the obvious", yet an obvious that very few have appreciated and practiced. Peters' recommendations are probably appropriate, some of the time, or

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\*An extensive discussion of early leadership views can be found in the Handbook of Leadership, edited by Ralph M. Stogdill, Free Press, 1974.

\*\*Fleishman, E.A. (1953). Leadership climate, human relations and supervisory behavior. Journal of Applied Psychology, 6, 2020-222.

maybe even most of the time. But, if we would follow them religiously when and where they are inappropriate, we would be in considerable trouble. How can we come to understand how the diverse multiple predictors of leadership excellence fit together? How can we understand when and where they are useful and when and where they are not? How do we determine which leadership style is appropriate - or which leader is appropriate today? How can we integrate the multiple demands and requirements of leadership?

I believe that the complexity approach again will not fail us. Leadership styles should match situational demands. They can be adapted to those demands. They can be adapted to the people who are the followers. To be an adaptive leader, we need, first of all, to understand what others are about. Secondly, we need to communicate effectively. Integrative multidimensionality can be a great aid in achieving these goals. Before we get deeply involved in the impact of multidimensionality upon leadership, let us first explore "understanding" and "communicating" as part of the art of leadership excellence. They are the first step in an application of multidimensionality.

#### THE ART OF LEADERSHIP

##### Perceiving and Understanding Others

I have already suggested that executives don't just sit there and make decisions. Decisions tend to grow out of extended consideration of facts, assumptions, information, ideas and concepts. The information, the facts, the assumptions often



derive from what other people say. And, decisions in executive environments are rarely the product of a single person. They are either made by groups or are, at least, one person's distillation of all those things that others have contributed. And, many of those contributions can be classified as information.

The opportunity to obtain useful information - whether it concerns innovation, responses to a competitor or whatever, depends on leadership quality. It depends to a great extent on the degree to which channels of communication are adequate and open. It depends upon the willingness of the executive to listen, even to ideas that are not so great. One might say, it depends on executives' respect and appreciation for the people of their organization.

Decisions are, in part, the outcomes of perceptions. We have already seen that how an executive perceives the organizational world is key to many of his or her actions. It is also the key to the executive's leadership style. If our executive views all tasks as relatively similar in their requirements, then both the resulting decision making style and the resulting leadership style will likely be invariant. As people change people or as situations change, such an invariant style will turn out to be maladaptive. It may be perfectly matched to the task in one setting, but it will probably be mismatched to the task in one setting, but it will probably be mismatched in the next and different task. If tasks are perceived as potentially different, if people are recognized and appreciated for their unique

differences and unique abilities, then the executive may be able to adapt his or here leadership style to current needs. Where these adaptations are appropriate, we have found a leader with a more general tendency toward leadership excellence.

Let us now look at those people who are followers. They would likely have at least some things in common. I will consider only one of these potential common characteristics which has major potential consequences. Americans have generally grown up in a competitive environment which values achieving more than the person next door. That competitive spirit, as I have already discussed, pervades our organizational word. Many senior executives strive to be the next CEO. Unions fight the management. The management tries to circumvent government regulations. Everyone competes with everyone else for the next promotion. One might even say that many employees of the organization have been trained to be a little paranoid, i.e., distrustful, about the actions and policies of their company, about those people who are in control, and even about the motives of many who are working at the same level. The result can be an unproductive or even a counterproductive hostility.

That kind of semi-paranoia motivates what some writers view as "healthy competition," but it also motivates actions that are designed to "get back at" anything or anyone seen as hostile, antagonistic, or possibly harmful. The result, especially among those managers who view themselves as "on the way up", may be increased efforts to achieve prominence and success, but it also

may be lowered interest, lack of motivation, diminished productivity and, certainly, little interest in contributing to innovation. Even where the outcome is increased effort, it may be misdirected against fellow executives rather than toward a cooperative mode that would aid the organization. Where distrust is rampant, managers fight for themselves, not for their company. Understanding the underlying basis of that kind of paranoia which is so common in some companies can be very helpful to the senior executive who wants to turn a failing organization around.

The distrust that I have called "semi-paranoid" is only one of several rather common characteristics of followers, at least in some organizations. However, beyond some generally similar characteristics of many employees, there are those characteristics that make each of them unique individuals: for example their interests, their specific needs, their unique abilities, their personality characteristics and much more. Some of us want to be respected, or - at least - appreciated. Some of us want power. Some of us want to be congratulated on our achievements. Some of us need to be pushed or, as Andrew Grove suggests\*, "nudged" to move forward. Others may want to have their jobs and work environments precisely structured by their supervisors. Some simply want to know or believe that they are understood. A willingness to listen to the concerns, gripes or, on the other hand, suggestions made by one individual can make an

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\*Grove, A.S. (1983). High output management. New York: Random House.

executive leader suddenly appear human to those he or she is leading. Often that is time, even if that executive cannot or would not make a decision that might satisfy an employees' concerns. On the other hand, listening to the concerns of an employee can and sometimes should lead to some minor adjustment that may cost the company little or nothing at all. However, it may buy that employee's devotion and loyalty for years to come.

It is so easy - and so typical - for individuals to effectively disappear among the masses of people that work for any large organization. To be recognized for one's own self, for one's own needs, concerns and, of course, one's contributions can have a major impact on an employee's view of the organization. In addition, the satisfaction of having been recognized, having been understood is something people tend to enthusiastically talk about. That kind of talk, particularly in an organization where employees previously felt that they were not a meaningful part of the company, can turn around what may have been a vicious circle of falling employee morale.

Of course, both task demands and leadership styles must be matched with the salient characteristics of people that are to be led. At a macro level, Japanese employees don't work for the same incentives, with the same motivations and with the same view of their organizations as Americans do. At a micro level, Mr. Jones may have a quite different approach to the job than Mr. Cohen. Both may be excellent employees. In some cases, both may be willing to do the job, as instructed, just because

they were asked to do it. In other cases they may have to be persuaded to the job in some specific fashion or even to do the job at all. Their individuality may necessitate that the different style of persuasion by the leader.

The excellent leader would not only adapt his or her leadership style to task demands but, where possible, to the specific people who are supervised. The leader must be able to differentiate the demands and characteristics of each task that must be completed. In addition, the leader must be able to empathize with those employees who are assigned to do the task, i.e., the executive leader must be able to understand what people think about task situations, and most of all, why they think the way they do. Often, that can be accomplished simply by attentive listening; but it must be empathic listening, trying to see things from the employee's point of view. It must be a kind of listening that, from the outset, assumes that the employee's views are, in their own way, reasonable and likely valid. Finally, the excellent leader should be able to integrate people characteristics and job demands to create a team that will employ an optimal approach to any task at hand. In other words, the excellent executive must use an integrative leadership style that optimally fits both tasks and the persons who are to do the task.

#### Communicating with Others

The best understanding of task demands and the best insight into the needs and desire of individuals is of little help to an

executive who does not have the facility to communicate effectively. Appropriate communication skills are among the most vital ingredients of executive behaviors if companies are to be successful. Executives must be able to communicate the goals of the company, their organization's policies and purpose and, hopefully, the entire content and feeling of the organization's culture. They should be able to communicate in a tone that is concise but caring, without hostility, without sarcasm, even without irony. Most of all, executives should apply these communication skills directly to needs and problems, to the wishes and dreams of the people that make up the employees, the suppliers, and the customers of their company.

Tom Peters\* and his associates have dwelled extensively on the requirements and techniques of dealing with people. I would suggest to the reader to obtain a set of cassette tapes which Peters has recorded. Listening, for example in your car on the way to work, is an easy task. Those tapes bring home the point in a very persuasive fashion: According to Peters, leadership excellence primarily means a focus on people; it means active two-way communication. The many examples which Peters presents need not be repeated here: his recordings and his books speak for themselves. I would recommend that the reader listen carefully to those views and suggestions and that the reader might apply them where they are appropriate (which, in my view,

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\*Peters, T. (1984). The excellence challenge. Waltham, MA: Excel/Media.

would be most - but not all - of the time and in most - but not all - situations). If the reader takes an integrative view, based on reading all of this book, it will become quite obvious where and when Peters' views do and don't apply. I don't want to belabor Tom Peters' points. They speak for themselves.

But I would like to select one of his points and one new example for emphasis in this chapter. First of all, people are important to the organization. Most of all, each individual is important: it may well be that one individual who will make the difference - you never know in advance. Innovative thoughts, new ideas, social and organizational change originate somewhere. Most of the time they do not originate where one would expect. Frequently, they do not come from individuals whom we might view as the most likely innovators. Letting individuals be important, communicating that importance, makes all the difference between employee loyalty and alienation. The alienated individual will contribute only what he or she has to - and may end up being destructive to boot. Loyalty, on the other hand, will let an individual identify and potentially contribute more to the organization than one would expect.

I have some disappointing news. We are not creatures who love each other out of the goodness of our moral hearts. We are not the selfless group oriented persons who only wish to contribute to society (as communist ideologies often argue we should). Rather, as individuals, we attempt to survive, to enhance and to actualize ourselves. To ourselves, we are

naturally most important. As a matter of fact (and as many communist and socialist regimes have found out) we don't function well if we are not given the opportunity to strive toward our own betterment. Somehow, we can't be trained to live our lives just for the community. But, our ancestry, across thousands of years, has led us to develop in a direction that permits us to display both hostile competition and cooperation, loyalty and love. If something threatens us, we will compete, we will learn to hate and we will fight. Unfortunately, we may become distrustful or, as I have suggested, semi-paranoid. We may perceive a threat that does not even exist, especially if our orientation and belief system is primarily competition oriented.

In contrast, if we learn to identify with something outside of ourselves - be that a person who satisfies our needs or some organization to which we can truly belong, we will likely go overboard to reward that person and that organization with our affections. We will consider that person's or that organizations successes and failures to be our own; we will acquire "ownership" rights. We will compete and fight against any outsiders that threaten that person or that organization. We will fight with all the strength we have. It is that spirit in our employees that we want to harness for rather than against our company.

If we want to gain loyalty or even love from our employees, then we must channel their emotions and their affections. And, loyalty is just about always a two-way street. If we do want loyalty from our workers, then we must communicate to them that



they are assured of loyalty by their company. If we want them to be motivated to work hard because they love their jobs, then they must know that they, in turn, are appreciated as individuals who make important contributions to their organization. Channeling the affections of employees toward the company also means re-channeling their hostility toward something that exists outside of the company, for example, toward the competitor.

#### Communications as Influence

People want to be respected and understood. They want to know that the leader understands where they are coming from. However, the information which the executive leader is communicating to employees need not, necessarily, relay the level of understanding which that executive has attained. Certainly the leader, here the executive, need not become the follower's psychiatrist. But there should be one commonality between psychiatrist and executive leader. Psychiatrists retrain their patients to think differently about their world. They exert considerable influence. The same must be true for the executive who is a true leader. Remember the Truman quote. The content of the executive leader's communication should be appropriate to influence the other person. Indeed, that influence requires the transmission of information, of respect for the other person's integrity and intelligence and, again, it requires, where possible, taking the relevant needs of the other person into account.

I am not suggesting that the leader should gain a complete

understanding of all of the needs and thought processes of all followers. As I said, the executive can hardly be a psychiatrist to the staff. As a matter of fact, that level of understanding would probably be as detrimental as the flawed managerial technique that has become known as "micro-managing." Fortunately, for those leaders who can perceptually integrate, understanding how their followers think is not difficult to achieve and provides the needed base for adaptation of any current leadership approach with changes in situations and people.

The problems generated when a leader fails to adapt to changes in situations which, in turn, produce changes in the needs and thoughts of followers have been clearly demonstrated by Suedfeld\*, who has done some fascinating research on the success of revolutionaries with their public. He compared those revolutionary leaders who managed to stay in power after the revolution with those who did not. His examples ranged from George Washington to Che Guevarra. To make these comparisons, Suedfeld and his team analyzed the communications written by these leaders both during and after the revolution's successful conclusion. The results are fascinating. Successfully revolutionary leaders communicated a single purposefulness to their followers. I would say, they were quite unidimensional in their approach. This kind of unidimensionality emerged clearly in the complexity scores which Suedfeld and associates obtained from

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\*Suedfeld, P. & Rank, A.D. (1976). Revolutionary leaders: Long-term success as a function of changes in conceptual complexity. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 34, 169-178.

their writings or speeches.

Now comes the interesting point. If these leaders continued to argue unidimensionally after the revolution had been successful, they were soon thrown out of power. Where, however, their later communications took on a multidimensional flavor, they typically maintained control of their movements and their countries. Clearly, those leaders who were able to adjust the dimensionality of their communications to changed situational demands, who were able to approach their public differently once the population was no longer fearful, stressed or whatever, could maintain themselves in the affection of their people. We might say that their dimensional style was contingent. Those who did not understand the need to adapt the dimensionality of their communications and probably the dimensionality of their actions were destined to fail. They lost their popular support and their positions.

Some may argue that leaders should not have to adapt to situations. Instead, the leader should work to change any particular situation to fit his or her preferred leadership style. I would say that such an approach is possible, but not likely. Most of the time it simply does not work. First of all, leaders who are generally unidimensional in their style of thinking would not likely consider such an option, no matter how intelligent they might be. Secondly, many situations are simply not adaptable. War is war, revolution is revolution and serious stress is serious stress. You can't change them or their impact

unless you stop the war, the revolution and the stress. That, however, is not always possible.

Suedfeld's research suggests that a leader's approach during times of crisis and serious stress should be straight forward, fixed in single purposefulness, i.e., unidimensional. In contrast, in the absence of crisis, a leader should function in more multidimensional fashion. Does that mean that a leader, when faced with less of an emergency, should communicate with subordinates in a highly multidimensional fashion? I would say not. For that matter, most of the post-revolutionary successful communications which Suedfeld and associates scored were not even integrative: they mostly reflected only differentiation. Differentiated communications to people make sense in many cases. People typically understand that alternatives exist. They may not like the fact that there is more than one way to look at issues, but most of them do (grudgingly) accept that there are options.

Interestingly enough, attitude researchers and advertising agencies have used the existence of alternate views to advantage in a procedure called "inoculation." Inoculation represents an attempt to familiarize people with diverse point of view and to provide defenses against some of these views, e.g., the "supposed" advantages of a competitor's product. Inoculation provides potential customers with effective advance counter-arguments on dimension(s) on which a competitor's propaganda onslaught is expected. For example, let us consider a company

that sells an over the counter drug. Information about a new competitor's coming ad campaign has been received. According to that information it is likely that the competitor corporation will emphasize that their brand "dissolves four times as fast in a person's stomach." The indirect implication that the competitor's drug would work four times as fast might impress consumers. How can one avoid such an impression? The consumer might be "inoculated" against the competitor's argument. A counter ad campaign, initiated just a little earlier than the competitor's ads, could emphasize that both products dissolve in stomach fluids in less than a second. That would make the time differential appear irrelevant. On the other hand, our drug company might want to add that their own product is twice as strong than the new competitor's. That, while also somewhat irrelevant (one could take two of the competitor's pills), might suggest greater effectiveness to the consumer. In other words, many consumers would be prevented from switching to the new competitor. Without the "inoculation," the argument about the rapidity with which the competitor's medication dissolves may have attracted many of these consumers to the competitor's brand.

Inoculation often works quite well: its use can be very effective if we want to maintain the allegiance of people to some specific product idea or ideology, or for that matter, if we want to maintain the allegiance of employees to a corporate culture or purpose. The existence and communication of differentiated concepts is nearly inevitable if inoculation is to be success-

fully used.

Effective communication requires the application of differentiation and integration to empathize with an employee. But, it requires more. The executive leader must select communication styles to match the capacity of the follower. One might say that the leader should send messages on a wavelength that the follower is able to receive. In other words, the leader must select an appropriate degree of differentiated (and sometimes integrated) information to successfully persuade and motivate. What degree of differentiation or integration may be used would, of course, depend in part upon the task and in another part upon the characteristics of followers. In other words, while our executive leader should be able to apply differentiation and integration at all needed levels to develop empathy leadership strategy and a leadership approach, he or she may need to adapt the actual communication of differentiated and/or integrated thoughts to the level of understanding and the needs of follower employees. People are only captured and persuaded at their own level of dimensionality. They will likely perceive a leader's communication at other levels as either "faulty" or as confusing\*.

But, communication is not just important with employees.

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\*I am talking about adapting the dimensionality of communications from leader to follower. The content of communications, however, must remain invariant. Followers talk to each other: if content were varied they would soon become suspicious. Effects would clearly be counterproductive because the leader's Credibility would be lost. Similarly, the overall goals communicated to followers should remain consistent.

It is equally important with customers, suppliers, and others who are important to the successful functioning of the organization. For example, Customer loyalty is just as important as employee loyalty. Let me tell you about a personal experience which indicates how effective communication with customers can be. As I am sitting and typing this chapter, I am drinking my first Classic Coca Cola. But let me start the story that leads to my first can of old-new Coke with an event that happened some time ago. Several months earlier, I ordered four IBM AT's and periphery to run research and training simulations. They were to arrive early last winter, but they did not. IBM discovered that their hard disk drives were faulty and discontinued delivery of the AT systems. After they corrected the problem and started shipping again, I finally got my equipment: about half a year too late. That had a number of unfortunate consequences for our research and training program and none of us were very happy with IBM.

In any case, the IBM representative who sold the AT systems has come by repeatedly after the delivery of the units to make use that everything was now going well. A couple of minor problems were corrected very quickly. In the process of his visits, we had a number of short and casual talks. One of them happened to be about Coca Cola. Coke had just introduced their new and supposedly better taste which everyone in our team disliked. I told the IBM representative one day that "if I wanted to drink Pepsi that had been standing open for two days I

would have bought Pepsi instead of Coke years ago. I didn't need for Coke to taste like that. Anyway, I said, I wouldn't buy an more Coke. Period. I just didn't like it. I don't remember whether the IBM representative intentionally elicited this information from me or whether the flow of our discussion was just an accident.

I have referred to decision making at Coca Cola elsewhere in this book. Surprised by the consumer reaction to their change of the original formula, Coca Cola decided to reintroduce the old Coke as Classic Coca Cola. I was impatiently waiting for the new-old classic formula to appear on store shelves. I couldn't find it in Washington (where I spend a good amount of time) or in Harrisburg, PA. Then, suddenly, this morning, there was a six-pack of classic Coke appeared in my office refrigerator. I asked my secretary where it came from. It was a present from our IBM representative, "to make amends" for the delay in the receipt of our AT systems. Now, I know that this kind of action on his part is "good business." A six-pack of coke does not cost anything in comparison to four AT systems. I also realize that there probably was a purpose behind the unexpected present. But, nonetheless, I loved it. Tom Peters is right: IBM cares about the customer. And, their caring has, once again, bought my loyalty despite their earlier flop-up.

What the IBM representative did was quite simple. He managed to empathize with a customer. And he was able to use the empathy, the understanding of the needs and concerns of a



customer to make that customer just a little happier. There is no question, empathic action can do the trick. Can we view his actions as a form of leadership? I think we can. He used his interpersonal influence to achieve a goal that is of importance to his company: future customer loyalty.

Before I go on, a couple of warnings. First of all, I have talked as though differentiative and integrative multidimensionality are the sine qua non of leadership. In some rare situations it may not make any difference whether there is any leadership at all. In others, it may make little difference who the leader is and what kind of leadership style he or she is using. The results are going to be similar anyhow. And, there certainly are situations where differentiation and integration are not needed. Fiedler\* would probably say that experience is much more important whenever stress is severe. I might even add that an authoritarian leader, under stress conditions, can sometimes be more useful. The burning factory example I presented earlier is a case in point. Even some more complex situations that lack in stress might be handled adequately by a leader who cannot differentiate or integrate, but only if that leader's style of perceiving and communicating happens to be appropriate to the task at hand and to the people involved. However, that leader may cease to be effective as tasks or as follower needs and characteristics change.

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\*Fiedler, F.E. (1984). Effects of intellectual ability and military experience on leadership performance. Paper presented at the ARI Conference, Georgetown University.

Summary: Where and What is Leadership Excellence?

Before providing a more precise statement of what leadership is, let me summarize some of the things I have said about leadership and about leadership excellence. First of all, whether excellent or poor, leadership involves an attempt to influence one or more other people. The leader has a goal in mind which may be precisely specified or might be relatively vague. To lead, a leader must focus on both the task and the people who are to do the task. To be a leader, one need not be at lofty levels in the organization: leadership demands may differ at the assembly line and in the executive suite; nonetheless, leadership is needed in both locations. And, of course, leadership may be excellent or poor, or anything in between no matter what its level.

Leadership excellence is not a trait that some people have and some people don't. Even the best leaders can fail from time to time. However, the best leaders are aware that changes in situations, in tasks and in personnel may require adaptive changes in their leadership style. The best leaders adapt the dimensionality of their leadership style to current demands. In situations that are stressful, where crisis exist and immediate action is required, an excellent leader would provide clear definitions of goals and would provide means to obtain these goals. The leader would be guided by experience and might demand a considerable level of precise cooperation, if not obedience. In contrast, where enough time is available, where tasks are

complex, where innovation and creativity are useful, the leader would leave the followers with more control of the situation.

For example, the leader might be involved in:

- (1) Listening with respect and appreciation to the unique thoughts and feelings of others, especially where these thoughts and feelings are relevant to the task at hand.
- (2) Motivating, understanding, encouraging and scolding, yet supporting followers.
- (3) Permitting the full development of followers toward potentials which aid organizational goals.
- (4) Perceiving and understanding the why and how of follower's thought processes, i.e., the assumptions and the dimensionality on which they base their concepts and behavior.
- (5) Using this dimensional understanding to communicate and to guide followers toward actions that are valuable to the organization.

To obtain these ends, the leader must engage in communicative and managerial functions that include the following characteristics:

- (1) Understanding of followers at whatever their dimensional level might be and restricting communications to them to their respective dimensionality.
- (2) Communicating the goals, policies and the culture of the organization at the dimensional level of the

followers.

- (3) Leaving the content of communications invariant across individuals despite the effort of matching dimensionality of the communications to the dimensionality of the recipient. A variable content would lead to confusion and distrust once people talk to others.
- (4) Employing adaptive, i.e., empathic, communication skills not only with employees but also with customers, clients, suppliers and any others that may have an impact on the success of the organization.
- (5) Providing frameworks for goals - whether short or long-range - but not specific decisions of how to reach these goals (unless stress, etc., levels are high).
- (6) Allowing employees to make decisions and plans, i.e., "Letting them do it" so they get the feelings of "ownership" and avoid feelings of exploitation or distrust.
- (7) Maintaining the focus upon goal orientation or refocusing specific goal orientations as people and situations change.
- (8) Allowing loyalty and ownership to develop to refocus distrust and hostility toward sources outside of the organization (e.g., toward competitors) and to permit cooperation and goal orientation within the organization.

- (9) Encouraging innovation by permitting employees enough freedom to explore options. Eliminating of punishments for having the "wrong idea."
- (10) Adapting information flow to generate optimal information processing by followers toward the organizational goals.
- (11) Applying interpersonal leadership as required, but stepping back when employees do well on their own.

These leadership characteristics are, without question, generated or aided by a leader's own differentiative and integrative multidimensionality. The next chapter will consider that impact of multidimensionality in detail. Let us, however, end this chapter with a definition. Leadership excellence is generated by the application of a multidimensional leadership style which involves interpersonal perception, communication and the successful use of influence toward short and long-term goals; it is a style which integrates people and task characteristics toward optimal performance in varied settings and across varied task demands.